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THE ALBANY DEPOT

BY

W. D. HOWELLS.

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THE ALBANY DEPOT

FARCE

THE ALBANY DEPOT

BY

W. D. HOWELLS

NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

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THE ALBANY DEPOT

FARCE

(THE ACTION PASSES IN BOSTON)

I

MR. AND MRS. EDWARD ROBERTS; THE CHOREWOMAN

MRS. ROBERTS, with many proofs of an afternoon's shopping in her hands and arms, appears at the door of the ladies' room, opening from the public hall, and studies the interior with a searching gaze, which develops a few suburban shoppers scattered over the settees, with their bags and packages, and two or three old ladies in the rocking-chairs. The Chorewoman is going about with a Saturday afternoon pail and mop, and profiting by the disoccupation of the place in the hour between the de-

partures of two great expresses, to wipe up the floor. She passes near the door where Mrs. Roberts is standing, and Mrs. Roberts appeals to her in the anxiety which her failure to detect the object of her search has awakened: "Oh, I was just looking for my husband. He was to meet me here at ten minutes past three; but there don't seem to *be* any gentlemen."

The Chorewoman: "Mem?"

Mrs. Roberts: "I was just looking for my husband. He was to meet me here at ten minutes past three; but there don't seem to be any gentlemen. You haven't happened to notice—"

The Chorewoman: "There's a gentleman over there beyant, readin', that's just come in. He seemed to be lukun' for somebody." She applies the mop to the floor close to Mrs. Roberts's skirts.

Mrs. Roberts, bending to the right and to the left, and then, by standing on tiptoe, catching sight of a hat round a pillar: "Then it's Mr. Roberts, of course. I'll just go right over to him. Thank you ever so much. Don't disturb your-

"Mrs. Roberts, with many proofs of an afternoon's shopping in her hand."

self!" She picks her way round the area of damp left by the mop, and approaches the hat from behind. "It *is* you, Edward! What a horrid idea I had! I was just going to touch your hat from behind, for fun; but I kept myself from it in time."

Roberts, looking up with a dazed air from the magazine in his hand: "Why, what would have happened?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh, you know it mightn't have been *you*."

Roberts: "But it *was* I."

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes, I know; and I was perfectly sure of it; you're always so prompt, and I always wonder at it, such an absent-minded creature as you are. But you came near spoiling everything by getting here behind this pillar, and burying yourself in your book that way. If it hadn't been for my principle of always asking questions, I never should have found you in the world. But just as I was really beginning to despair, the Chorewoman came by, and I asked her if she had seen any gentleman here lately; and she said there was one now, over

here, and I stretched up and saw you. I had such a fright for a moment, not seeing you; for I left my little plush bag with my purse in it at Stearns's, and I've got to hurry right back; though I'm afraid they'll be shut when I get there, Saturday afternoon, this way; but I'm going to rattle at the front door, and perhaps they'll come—they always stay, some of them, to put the goods away; and I can tell them I don't want to buy anything, but I left my bag with my purse in it, and I guess they'll let me in. I want you to keep these things for me, Edward, and I'll leave my shopping-bag; I sha'n't want it any more. Don't lose any of them. Better keep them all in your lap here together, and then nobody will come and sit on them." She disburdens herself of her packages and parcels, and arranges them on her husband's knees, while she goes on talking. "I'm almost ready to drop, I'm so tired, and I do believe I should let you go up to Stearns's for me; but you couldn't describe the bag so they would recognize it, let alone what was in it, and they wouldn't give it to you,

even if they would let you in to inquire: they're much more likely to let a lady in than a gentleman. But I shall take a coupé, and tell the driver simply to fly, though there's plenty of time to go to the ends of the earth and back before our train starts. Only I should like to be here to receive the Campbells, and keep Willis from buying tickets for Amy and himself, and us, too, for that matter; he has that vulgar passion—I don't know where he's picked it up—for wanting to pay everybody's way; and you'd never think of your Hundred-Trip ticket-book till it was too late. Do take your book out and hold it in your hand, so you'll be sure to remember it, as soon as you see Willis. You had better keep saying over to yourself, 'Willis—Hundred-Trip Tickets — Willis — Hundred-Trip Tickets;' that's the way *I* do. Where *is* the book? I have to remember everything! *Do* keep your ticket-book in your hand, Edward, till Willis comes."

Roberts: "But I want to read, Agnes, and I've got to hold my *Pop. Sci.* with one hand and keep your traps in my

lap with the other. Did you find a cook?"

Mrs. Roberts, with rapturous admiration of him: "Well, Edward, you *have* got a brain! I declare, the cook had utterly gone out of my mind. Forgetting that plush bag makes me forget everything. I've got a splendid one—a perfect treasure. She won't do any of the wash, and we'll have to put that out; and she's been used to having a kitchen-maid; but she said we were such a small family that she could shell the pease herself. She's the most respectable-looking old thing you ever saw; and she's been having ten dollars a week from the last family she was in; but she'll come the summer with us for six. I was very fortunate to get her; all the good girls are snapped up for the sea-side in May, and they won't go into the country for love or money. It was the greatest chance! She's such a neat, quiet, lady-like person, and all the better for being Irish and a Catholic: Catholics *do* give so much more of a flavor; and I never could associate that Nova Scotia, sunken-cheek-

ed leanness of Maria's with a cook. This one's name is — well, I forget what her name is; Bridget, or Norah, or something like that—and she's a perfect little butter-ball. She's coming to go out on the same train with us; and she'll get the dinner to-night; and I sha'n't have the mortification of sitting down to a pick-up meal with Amy Campbell, the first time she has visited us; she's conceited enough about her house-keeping as it is, I'm sure, and I wouldn't have her patronizing and pitying me for worlds. The cook will be here at half-past three precisely; I had to pretend the train started a little earlier than it does so as to make her punctual; they *are* such uncertain things! and I don't suppose I shall be back by that time, quite, Edward, and so you must receive her. Let me see!" She glances up at the clock on the wall. "It's just quarter-past now, and our train goes at ten minutes to four— My goodness! I'll have to hurry."

The Colored Man who cries the trains, walking half-way into the room and then out: "Cars ready for Cottage Farms,

Longwood, Chestnut Hill, Brookline, Newton Centre, Newton Highlands, Waban, Riverside, and all stations between Riverside and Boston. Circuit Line train now ready on Track No. 3."

Mrs. Roberts, in extreme agitation: "Good gracious, Edward, that's our train!"

Roberts, jumping to his feet and dropping all her packages: "No, no, it isn't, my dear! That's the Circuit Line train: didn't you hear? Ours doesn't go till ten to four, on the Main Line."

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh yes, so it does. How ridiculous! But now I *must* run away and leave you, or I never shall get back in time. Be sure to speak to the cook as soon as she comes in, or she'll get discouraged and go away again; you can't depend on them for an instant; I told her *you* would be here to meet her, if I wasn't—I thought I might be late; and you mustn't let her slip. And if the Campbells happen to get here before I'm back, don't you give them the least inkling of our having just engaged a cook. I'm going to smuggle her into the house

"He loses himself in his reading, while people come and go restlessly."

without Amy's knowing it; I wouldn't have her know it for the world. She prides herself on keeping that impudent, spoiled thing of hers, with her two soups; and she would simply never stop crowing if she knew I'd had to change cooks in the middle of the summer."

Roberts, picking up and dropping the multitudinous packages, and finally sitting down with them all in his lap, very red and heated: "I'll be careful, my dear."

Mrs. Roberts: "How flushed you are, bending over! You're so stout now, you ought to bend sidewise; it's perfect folly, your trying to bend *straight* over; you'll get apoplexy. But now I *must* run, or I shall never be back in the world. Don't forget to look out for the cook!"

Roberts, at whom she glances with misgiving as she runs out, holding the parcels on his knees with both elbows and one hand, and contriving with the help of his chin to get his magazine open again: "No, no; I won't, my dear." He loses himself in his reading, while people come and go restlessly. A gentle-

man finally drops into the seat beside him, and contemplates his absorption with friendly amusement.

II

ROBERTS AND WILLIS CAMPBELL

Campbell: "Don't mind *me*, Roberts."

Roberts, looking up: "Heigh? What! Why, Willis! Glad to see you—"

Campbell: "Now that you *do* see me, yes, I suppose you are. What have you got there that makes you cut all your friends?" He looks at Roberts's open page. "Oh! *Popular Science Monthly*. Isn't Agnes a little afraid of your turning out an agnostic? By-the-way, where *is* Agnes?"

Roberts: "She left her purse at Stearns's, and she's gone back after it. Where's Amy?"

Campbell: "Wherever she said she wouldn't be at the moment. I expected to find her here with you and Agnes. What time did you say your train started?"

Roberts: "At ten minutes to four. And, by-the-way — I'd almost forgotten it—I must keep an eye out for the cook Agnes has been engaging. She was to meet us here before half-past two, and I shall have to receive her. You mustn't tell Amy; Agnes doesn't want her to know she's been changing cooks; and I've got to be very vigilant not to let her give us the slip, or you won't have any dinner to-night."

Campbell: "Is that so? Well, that interests *me*. Were you expecting to find her in the *Pop. Sci.*?"

Roberts: "Oh, I'd only been reading a minute when you came in."

Campbell: "I don't believe you know how long you'd been reading. Very likely your cook's come and gone."

Roberts, with some alarm: "She couldn't. I'd only just opened the book."

Campbell: "I dare say you *think* so. But you'd better cast your eagle eye over this assemblage now, and see if she isn't here; though probably she's gone. What sort of looking woman is she?"

Roberts, staring at him in consterna-

tion: "Bless my soul! I don't know! I never saw her!"

Campbell: "Never saw her?"

Roberts: "No; Agnes engaged her at the intelligence-office, and told her we should meet her here, and she had to go back for her purse, and left me to explain."

Campbell: "Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! How did she expect you to recognize her?"

Roberts: "I—I don't know, I'm sure. She—she was very anxious I shouldn't let her get away."

Campbell, laughing: "You poor old fellow! What are you going to do?"

Roberts: "I'm sure I've no idea. Agnes—"

Campbell: "Agnes ought to have a keeper. You know what I've always thought of *your* presence of mind, Roberts; but Agnes—I'm really surprised at Agnes. This is too good! I must tell Amy this. She'll never get over this. Ah, ha, ha, ha!"

Roberts: "No, no! You mustn't, Willis. Agnes would be very much pro-

voked with me, if you told Amy she had been engaging a cook. She expects to smuggle her into the house without Amy's knowing."

Campbell: "And she left you to meet her here, and keep her—a cook you'd never set eyes on! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Ah, ha, ha, ha! What's her name?"

Roberts: "Agnes couldn't remember her last name—one never remembers a cook's last name. Her first name is Norah or Bridget."

Campbell: "Maggie, perhaps; they all sound alike. Ah, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! This improves."

Roberts: "Don't, Willis; you'll attract attention. What—what shall I do? If Agnes comes back, and finds I've let the cook get away, she'll be terribly put out."

Campbell: "Perfectly furious, you poor old fellow!—the rage of a disappointed pigeon! I wouldn't be in your shoes for anything. Oh my! I wish Amy was here. Did—did—Agnes"—(he struggles with his laughter, and explodes from time to time between syllables)—

"did she tell you how the woman looked?"

Roberts: "She said she was a very respectable-looking old thing — a perfect butter-ball. I suppose she was stout."

Campbell: "That covers the ground of a great many cooks. They're apt to look respectable when they're off duty and they're not in liquor, and they're apt to be perfect butter-balls. Any other distinctive traits?"

Roberts, ruefully: "I don't know. She's Irish, and a Catholic."

Campbell: "They're apt to be Irish, and Catholics too. Well, Roberts, I don't see what you can ask better. All you've got to do is to pick out a respectable butter-ball of that religion and nationality, and tell her you're Mrs. Roberts's husband, and you're to keep her from slipping away till Mrs. Roberts gets here."

Roberts: "Oh, pshaw, now, Willis! What would you do?"

Campbell. "*There's* a respectable butter-ball over in the corner by the window there. You'd better go and speak to her. She's got a gingham bundle, like a cook's,

"'There's a respectable butter-ball over in the corner by the window there.

in her lap, and she keeps looking about in a fidgety way, as if she expected somebody. I guess that's your woman, Roberts. Better not let her give you the slip. You'll never hear the last of it from Agnes if you do. And who'll get our dinner to-night?"

Roberts, looking over at the woman in the corner, with growing conviction: "She does answer to the description."

Campbell: "Yes, and she looks tired of waiting. If I know anything of that woman's character, Roberts, she thinks she's been trifled with, and she's not going to stay to be made a fool of any longer."

Roberts, getting to his feet: "Do you think so? What makes you think so? Would you go and speak to her?"

Campbell: "I don't know. She seems to be looking this way. Perhaps she thinks she recognizes *you*, as she never saw you before."

Roberts: "There can't be any harm in asking her? She does seem to be looking this way."

Campbell: "Pretty blackly, too. I

guess she's lost faith in you. It wouldn't be any use to speak to her now, Roberts."

Roberts: "I don't know. I'm afraid I'd better. I must. How would you introduce the matter, Willis?"

Campbell: "Oh, I wouldn't undertake to say! I must leave that entirely to you."

Roberts: "Do you think I'd better go at it boldly, and ask her if she's the one; or—or—approach it more gradually?"

Campbell: "With a few remarks about the weather, or the last novel, or a little society gossip? Oh, decidedly."

Roberts: "Oh, come, now, Willis! What would you advise? You must see it's very embarrassing."

Campbell: "Not the least embarrassing. Simplest thing in the world!"

The Colored Man who calls the Trains, coming and going as before: "Cars for Newton, Newtonville, West Newton, Auburndale, Riverside, Wellesley Hills, Wellesley, Natick, and South Framingham. Express to Newton. Track No. 5."

Campbell: "Ah, she's off! She's go-

ing to take the wrong train. She's gathering her traps together, Roberts!"

Roberts: "I'll go and speak to her." He makes a sudden dash for the woman in the corner. Campbell takes up his magazine, and watches him over the top of it, as he stops before the woman, in a confidential attitude. In a moment she rises, and with a dumb show of offence gathers up her belongings and marches past Roberts to the door, with an angry glance backward at him over her shoulder. He returns crestfallen to Campbell.

Campbell, looking up from his magazine, in affected surprise: "Where's your cook? You don't mean to say she was the wrong woman?"

Roberts, gloomily: "She wasn't the right one."

Campbell: "How do you know? What did you say to her?"

Roberts: "I asked her if she had an appointment to meet a gentleman here."

Campbell: "You *did?* And what did she say?"

Roberts: "She said 'No!' very sharp-

ly. She seemed to take it in dudgeon; she fired up."

Campbell: "I should think so. Sounded like an improper advertisement."

Roberts, in great distress: "*Don't*, Willis, for Heaven's sake!"

Campbell: "Why, you must see it had a very clandestine look. How did you get out of it?"

Roberts: "I didn't. I got into it further. I told her my wife had made an appointment for me to meet a cook here that she'd engaged—"

Campbell: "You added insult to injury. Go on!"

Roberts: "And that she corresponded somewhat to the description; and—and—"

Campbell: "Well?"

Roberts: "And she told me she was no more a cook than my wife was; and she said she'd teach me to be playing my jokes on ladies; and she grabbed up her things and flew out of the room."

Campbell: "Waddled, *I* should have said. But this is pretty serious, Roberts. She may be a relation of John L. Sulli-

van's. I guess we better get out of here; or, no, we can't! We've got to wait for Amy and Agnes."

Roberts: "What — what would you do?"

Campbell: "I don't know. Look here, Roberts: would you mind sitting a little way off, so as to look as if I didn't belong with you? I don't want to be involved in this little row of yours unnecessarily."

Roberts: "Oh, come now, Willis! You don't think she'll make any trouble? I apologized. I said everything I could think of. She *must* think I was sincere."

Campbell: "In taking her for a cook? I've no doubt she did. But I don't see how that would help matters. I don't suppose she's gone for an officer; but I suspect she's looking up the largest Irishman of her acquaintance, to come back and interview you. I should advise you to go out and get on some train; I'd willingly wait here for Amy and Agnes; but you see the real cook might come here, after you went, and I shouldn't know her from Adam—or Eve. See?"

Roberts, desperately: "I see— Good heavens! Here comes that woman back; and a man with her. Willis, you must help me out." Roberts gets falteringly to his feet, and stands in helpless apprehension, while Mr. and Mrs. McIlheny bear down upon him from the door. Mr. McIlheny, a small and wiry Irishman, is a little more vivid for the refreshment he has taken. He is in his best black suit, and the silk hat which he wears at a threatening slant gives dignified impressiveness to his figure and carriage. With some dumb-show of inquiry and assurance between himself and his wife, he plants himself in front of Roberts, in an attitude equally favorable for offence and defence.

III

THE McILHENYS, ROBERTS, AND CAMPBELL

McIlheny: "And are ye the mahn that's after takun' my wife for yer cuke?"

Mrs. McIlheny, indicating Campbell, absorbed in his magazine: "And there's

the other wan I saw jokun' wid um, and puttun' um up to it."

McIlheny, after a swift glance at Campbell's proportions and self-possession: "That's what ye're after thinkun', Mary; but I haven't got annything to do with what ye're after thinkun'. All I wannt to know is what this mahn meant by preshumin' to speak to a lady he didn't know, and takun' her for a cuke." To Roberts: "Will ye tell me that, ye—"

Roberts, in extreme embarrassment: "Yes, yes, certainly; I shall be very glad to explain, if you'll just step here to the corner. We're attracting attention where we are—"

McIlheny: "Attintion! Do ye suppose I care for attintion, when it's me wife that's been insulted?" He follows Roberts up, with Mrs. McIlheny, as he retires to the corner where she had been sitting, out of the way of the people coming and going. Campbell, after a moment, closes his magazine, and joins them.

Roberts: "Insulted? By no manner of means! Nothing was further from my thoughts. I—I—can explain it all

in a moment, my dear sir, if you will have patience; I can indeed. I have the highest respect for the lady, and I'm quite incapable of offering her an affront. The fact is—I hardly know how to begin—"

McIlheny: "Go ahn, sor; or I'll have to do the beginnun' meself, pretty soon." He shifts himself from one foot to another with a saltatory briskness.

Roberts: "The fact is, my wife had engaged a cook, up-town, and she had sent her down here to meet me, and go out with me to our summer place at Weston."

McIlheny: "An' fwhat has all that rigamarole to do wid your speakin' to a lady ye'd never been inthrojuced to? Fwhat had yer wife's cuke to do with Mrs. McIlheny?"

Roberts: "Why, I didn't know the cook by sight, you see. My wife had engaged her up-town, and appointed her to meet me here, without reflecting that I had never seen her, and wouldn't know who she was, when I *did* see her; she partly expected to be here herself, and so I didn't reflect, either."

"'Go ahn, sor: or I'll have to do the beginnin' meself, pretty soon."

McIlheny, with signs of an amicable interest: "An' she lift ye to mate a lady ye never had seen before, and expicted ye to know her by soight?"

Roberts: "Precisely."

McIlheny, smiling: "Well, that's loike a wooman, Mary; ye can't say it ain't."

Mrs. McIlheny, grinning: "It's loike a mahn, too, Mike, by the same token."

McIlheny: "Sure it's no bad joke on ye, sor."

Campbell, interposing: "I was having my laugh at him when your good lady here noticed us. You see, I know his wife—she's my sister—and I could understand just how she would do such a thing, and—ah, ha, ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! I don't think I shall ever get over it."

McIlheny: "Sure it *is* good! Hu, hu, hu, hu! Mary, it's what ye'd call a bull, if it was Irish, I'm thinkun'; an' it's no bad bull as it is, my dear."

Mrs. McIlheny, laughing: "Ye're right there, Mike. It's as fine a bull as ever there was."

Campbell: "And my friend here in-

sisted on going over and speaking to the lady, in hopes she could help him out of the difficulty. I suppose he bungled it; he only wanted to ask her if she'd seen a cook here, who had an appointment to go out of town with a gentleman. I'd been joking him about it, and he thought he must do something; and I fancy he made a mess of it. He was a good deal worked up. Ha, ha, ha! Ah, ha, ha, ha!" Mr. and Mrs. McIlheny join in his laugh, and finally Roberts himself.

The Colored Man who calls the Trains, coming and going: "Cars for Auburndale, Riverside, Pine Grove, and Newton Lower Falls. Express to Auburndale, Track No. 7."

Mrs. McIlheny: "There's our train, Mike! Come!"

McIlheny: "So 'tis, Mary! Well, I'm hawpy to make yer acquaintance, gentlemen; and if ye're ever in the City Hahl when the Council is sittun', and ye'll send in yer names to Mike McIlheny, I'll be pl'ased to show ye ahl the attintion in me power. Ye must excuse me now; we're jist runnun' out to the Fahls to pass

"'Sure it's no bad joke on ye, sor.'"

Sunday at a cousin's of Mrs. McIlheny's." He shakes hands with Roberts and Campbell, and runs out, followed by his wife.

IV

ROBERTS AND CAMPBELL

Campbell: "Distinguished public character. Well, we're out of that, Roberts. I had to crowd the truth a little for you, but I fetched the belligerent McIlheny. What are you going in for next?"

Roberts: "I—upon my word, I haven't the least idea. I think I shall give up trying to identify the cook. Agnes must do it herself when she comes here."

Campbell: "Oh no! *That* won't do, old fellow. The cook may come here and give you the slip before Agnes gets back."

Roberts: "What would you do?"

Campbell: "Well, I don't know; I don't like to advise, exactly; but it seems to me you've got to keep trying. You've got to keep your eye out for respectable

butter-balls, and not let them slip through your fingers."

Roberts: "You mean, go up and speak to them? I *couldn't* do that again."

Campbell: "Well, of course you didn't make a howling success with Mrs. McIlheny; but it wasn't a dead-failure either. But you must use a little more diplomacy — lead up to the subject gently. Don't go and ask a woman if she's a cook, or had an appointment to meet a gentleman here. *That* won't do. I'll tell you! You might introduce the business by asking if she had happened to see a lady coming in or going out; and then describe Agnes, and say you had expected to meet her here. And she'll say she hadn't seen her here, but such a lady had just engaged her as a cook. And then you'll say you're the lady's husband, and you're sure she'll be in in a moment. And there you are! That's the way you ought to have worked it with Mrs. McIlheny. Then it would have come out all right."

Roberts, pessimistically: "I don't see how it would have made her the cook."

Campbell: "It couldn't have done that,

of course; but it would have done everything short of that. But we're well enough out of it, anyway. It was mighty lucky I came in with my little amendment just when I did. There's all the difference in the world between asking a lady whether she *is* a cook and whether she's *seen* a cook. That difference just saved the self-respect of the McIlhenys, and saved your life. It gave the truth a slight twist in the right direction. You can't be too careful about the truth, Roberts. You can't offer it to people in the crude state; it's got to be prepared. If you'd carried it through the way I wanted you to, the night you and old Bemis garroted each other, you'd have come out perfectly triumphant. What you want is not the *real* truth, but the *ideal* truth; not what you *did*, but what you *ought* to have done. Heigh? Now, you see, those McIlhenys have gone off with their susceptibilities in perfect repair, simply because I substituted a *for* for an *if*, and made you inquire *for* a cook instead of *if* she was a cook. Perhaps you did ask for instead of ask if?"

Roberts: "No, no. I asked her if she *was* a cook."

Campbell: "Well, I'm glad the McIlhenys had too much sense to believe that. They're happy, anyway. They're enjoying the hobble that you and Agnes are in, with lofty compassion. They—hello! here's that fellow coming back again!"

Roberts: "Who? Which? Where?" He starts nervously about, and confronts Mr. McIlheny bearing down upon him with a countenance of provisional severity.

McIlheny: "Just wan word more wid you, sor. Mrs. McIlheny has been thinkun' it oover, and she says you didn't ask her if she was after *seeun'* a cuke, but whether she was after *beun'* a cuke? Now, sor, which wahs ut? Out wid ut! Don't be thinkun' ye can throw dust in our eyes because we're Irishmen!" A threatening tone prevails in Mr. McIlheny's address at the mounting confusion and hesitation in Roberts. "Come! are ye deef, mahn?"

Roberts, in spite of Campbell's dumb-show inciting him to fiction: "I—I—if you will kindly step apart here, I can ex-

plain. I was very confused when I spoke to Mrs. McIlheny."

McIlheny, following him and Willis into the corner: "Fwhat made ye take my wife for a cuke? Did she luke anny more like a cuke than yer own wife? Her family is the best in County Mayo. Her father kept six cows, and she never put her hands in wather. And ye come up to her in a public place like this, where ye're afraid to spake aboove yer own breath, and ask her if she's after beun' the cuke yer wife's engaged. Fwhat do ye mane by ut?"

Roberts: "My dear sir, I know—I can understand how it seems offensive; but I can assure you that I had no intention —no—no—" he falters, with an imploring glance at Campbell, who takes the word.

Campbell: "Look here, Mr. McIlheny, you can appreciate the feelings of a gentleman situated as my friend was here. He had to meet a lady whom he had never seen before, and didn't know by sight; and we decided—Mrs. McIlheny was so pleasant and kindly looking—that

he should go and ask her if she had seen a lady of the description he was looking for, and—"

McIlheny: "Yessor! I can appreciate ahl *that*. But fwhy did he ask her if *she* was the lady? Fwhy did he ask her if she was a cuke? That's what I wannt to know!"

Campbell: "Well, now, I'm sure you can understand that. He was naturally a good deal embarrassed at having to address a strange lady; his mind was full of his wife's cook, and instead of asking her if she'd *seen* a cook, he bungled and he blundered, and asked her—I suppose—if she *was* a cook. Can't you see that? how it would happen?"

McIlheny, with conviction: "Yessor, I can. And I'll feel it an hannor if you gintlemen will join me in a glass of wine on the carner, across the way—"

Campbell: "But your train?"

McIlheny: "Oh, domn the thrain! But I'll just stip aboord and tell Mrs. McIlheny I've met a frind, an' I'll be out by the next thrain, an' I'll be back wid you

in a jiffy." He runs out, and Campbell turns to Roberts.

Roberts: "Good heavens, Willis! what are we going to do? Surely, we can't go out and drink with this man?"

Campbell: "I'm afraid we sha'n't have the pleasure. I'm afraid Mrs. McIlheny is of a suspicious nature; and when Mr. Mac comes back, it'll be to offer renewed hostility instead of renewed hospitality. I don't see anything for us but flight, Roberts. Or, *you* can't fly, you poor old fellow! You've got to stay and look out for that cook. I'd be glad to stay for you, but, you see, I should not know her."

Roberts: "I don't know her either, Willis. I was just thinking whether you couldn't manage this wretched man rather better alone. I—I'm afraid I confuse you; and he gets things out of me —admissions, you know—"

Campbell: "No, no! Your moral support is everything. That lie of mine is getting whittled away to nothing; we shall soon be down to the bare truth. If it hadn't been for these last admissions

of yours, I don't know what I should have done. They were a perfect inspiration. I'll tell you what, Roberts! I believe you can manage this business twice as well without me. But you must keep your eye out for the cook! You mustn't let any respectable butter-ball leave the room without asking her if she's the one. You'll know how to put it more delicately now. And I won't complicate you with McIlheny any more. I'll just step out here—"

Roberts: "No, no, no! You mustn't go, Willis. You mustn't indeed! I shouldn't know what to do with that tipsy nuisance. Ah, here he comes again!"

Campbell, cheerily, to the approaching McIlheny: "I hope you didn't lose your train, Mr. McIlheny!"

McIlheny, darkly: "Never moind my thrain, sor! My wife says it was a put-up jahb between ye. She says ye were afther laughun', and lukun' and winkun' at her before this mahn stipped up to spake to her. Now what do ye make of that?"

Campbell: "We were laughing, of

course. I had been laughing at my friend's predicament, in being left to meet a lady he'd never seen before. You laughed at it yourself."

McIlheny: "I did, sor."

Roberts, basely truckling to him: "It was certainly a ludicrous position."

Campbell: "And when we explained it, it amused your good lady too. She laughed as much as yourself—"

McIlheny: "She did, sor. Ye're right. Sure it would make a cow laugh. Well, gintlemen, ye must excuse me. Mrs. McIlheny says I mustn't stop for the next thrain, and I'll have to ask you to join me in that glass of wine some other toime."

Campbell: "Oh, it's all right, Mr. McIlheny. You've only got about half a minute." He glances at the clock, and McIlheny runs out, profusely waving his hand in adieu.

Roberts, taking out his handkerchief and wiping his forehead: "Well, thank Heaven! we're rid of him at last."

Campbell: "I'm not so sure of that. He'll probably miss the train. You may

be sure Mrs. McIlheny is waiting for him outside of it, and then we shall have them both on our hands indefinitely. We shall have to explain and explain. Fiction has entirely failed us, and I feel that the truth is giving way under our feet. I'll tell you what, Roberts!"

Roberts, in despair: "What?"

Campbell: "Why, if McIlheny should happen to come back alone, we mustn't wait for him to renew his invitation to drink; we must take him out ourselves, and get him drunk; so drunk he can't remember anything; stone drunk; dead drunk. Or, that is, *you* must. I haven't got anything to do with him. I wash my hands of the whole affair."

Roberts: "You mustn't, Willis! You know I can't manage without you. And you know I can't take the man out and get him drunk. I couldn't. I shouldn't feel that it was right."

Campbell: "Yes, I know. You'd have to drink with him; and you've got no head at all. You'd probably get drunk first, and I don't know what I should say to Agnes."

Roberts: "That isn't the point, Willis. I couldn't ask the man to drink; I should consider it immoral. Besides, what should you do if the cook came while I was away? You wouldn't know her."

Campbell: "Well, neither would you, if you stayed."

Roberts: "That's true. There doesn't seem to be any end of it, or any way out of it. I must just stay and bear it."

Campbell: "Of *course* you must stay. And when McIlheny comes back, you'd better ask him out to look upon the wine when it is red."

Roberts: "No; that's impossible, quite. I shouldn't mind the association—though it isn't very pleasant; but to offer drink to a man already— Do you suppose it would do to ask him out for a glass of soda? Plain soda would be good for him. Or I could order claret in it, if the worst came to the worst."

Campbell: "Claret! What Mr. McIlheny requires is forty-rod whiskey in a solution of sulphuric acid. You must take that, or fourth-proof brandy straight, with him."

Roberts, miserably: "I couldn't; you know I couldn't."

Campbell: "What are you going to do, then?"

Roberts: "I don't know; I don't know. I—I'll give him in charge to a policeman."

Campbell: "And make a scandal here?"

Roberts: "Of course it can't be done!"

Campbell: "Of *course* it can't. Give a councilman in charge? The policeman will be Irish too, and then what'll you do? You're more likely to be carried off yourself, when the facts are explained. They'll have an ugly look in the police report."

Roberts: "Oh, it can't be done! Nothing can be done! I wish Agnes would come!"

The Colored Man who calls the Trains: "Cars ready for South Framingham, Whitneys, East Holliston, Holliston, Metcalf's, Braggville, and Milford. Express to Framingham. Milford Branch. Track No. 3."

V

MRS. ROBERTS, MRS. CAMPBELL, ROBERTS, AND CAMPBELL; THEN THE COOK AND McILHENY

Mrs. Roberts, rushing in and looking about in a flutter, till she discovers her husband: "Good gracious, Edward! Is that our train? I ran all the way from the station door as fast as I could run, and I'm perfectly out of breath. Did you ever hear of anything like my meeting Amy on the very instant? She was getting out of her coupé just as I was getting out of mine, and I saw her the first thing as soon as I looked up. It was the most wonderful chance. And the moment we pushed our way through the door and got inside the outer hall, I heard the man calling the train—he calls so distinctly—and I told her I was sure it was our train; and then we just simply flew, both of us. I had the greatest time getting my plush bag. They were all locked up at Stearns's as tight as a

drum, but I saw somebody inside, moving about, and I rattled the door, and made signs till he came; and then I said I had left my plush bag; and he said it was against the rules, and I'd have to come Monday; and I told him I knew it was, and I didn't expect him to transgress the rules, but I wished very much to have my plush bag, because there were some things in it that I wished to have, as well as my purse; for I'd brought away my keys in it; and I knew Willis — how d'ye do, Willis? — would want wine with his dinner, and you'd have to break the closet open if I didn't get the key; and so he said he would see if the person who kept the picked-up things was there yet; and it turned out he was, and he asked me for a description of the bag and its contents; and I described them all, down to the very last thing; and he said I had the greatest memory he ever saw. And now I think everything is going off perfectly, and I shall be able to show Amy that there's something inland as well as at the seaside. Why don't you speak to her, Ed-

ward? What is the matter? What are you looking at?" She detects him in the act of craning his neck to this side and that, and peering over people's heads and shoulders in the direction of the door. "Hasn't Norah—Bridget, I mean—come yet?" She frowns significantly, and cautions him concerning Mrs. Campbell by pressing her finger to her lip.

Roberts: "Yes—yes, she's here; I suppose she's—she's here. How do you do, Amy? So glad—" He continues his furtive inspection of the door-way, and Willis turns away with a snicker.

Mrs. Campbell: "Willis, what are you laughing at? Is there anything wrong with my bonnet? Agnes, *is* there? He would let me go about looking like a perfect auk. Did I bang it getting out of the coupé. Do tell me, Willis!"

Mrs. Roberts, to her husband: "You don't mean to say you haven't *seen* her yet?"

Roberts, desperately: "Seen her? How should I know whether I've seen her? I never saw her in my life."

Mrs. Roberts: "Then what are you looking for, in that way?"

Roberts: "I—I'm looking for her husband."

Mrs. Roberts: "Her husband?"

Roberts: "Yes. He keeps coming back." Campbell bursts into a wild shriek of laughter.

Mrs. Roberts, imploringly: "Willis, what *does* it mean?"

Mrs. Campbell, threateningly: "Willis, if you don't behave yourself—"

Mrs. Roberts, with the calm of despair: "Well, then, she isn't coming! She's given us the slip! I might have known it! Well, the cat might as well come out of the bag first as last, Amy, though I was trying to keep it in, to spare your feelings; I knew you'd be so full of sympathy." Suddenly to her husband: "But if you saw her husband— Did he say she sent him? I didn't dream of her being married. How do you know it's her husband?"

Roberts: "Because—because she went out and got him! Don't I tell you?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Went out and got him?"

Roberts: "When I spoke to her."

"'This is one of your tricks, Willis—one of your vile practical jokes.'"

Mrs. Roberts: "When you spoke to her? But you said you didn't see her!"

Roberts: "Of *course* I didn't see her. How should I see her, when I never saw her before? I went up and spoke to her, and she said she wasn't the one. She was very angry, and she went out and got her husband. He was tipsy, and he's been coming back ever since. I don't know what to do about the wretched creature. He says I've insulted his abominable wife!"

Campbell, laughing: "O Lord! Lord! This will be the death of me!"

Mrs. Campbell: "This is one of your tricks, Willis; one of your vile practical jokes."

Campbell: "No, no, my dear! I couldn't invent anything equal to *this*. Oh my! oh my!"

Mrs. Campbell, seizing him by the arm: "Well, if you don't tell, instantly, what it is—"

Campbell: "But I *can't* tell. I promised Roberts I wouldn't."

Roberts, wildly: "Oh, tell, tell!"

Campbell: "About the cook, too, Agnes?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes, yes; everything! Only tell!"

Campbell, struggling to recover himself: "Why, you see, Agnes engaged a cook, up-town—"

Mrs. Roberts: "I didn't want you to know it, Amy. I thought you would be troubled if you knew you were coming to visit me just when I was trying to break in a new cook, and so I told Edward not to let Willis know. Go on, Willis."

Mrs. Campbell: "And I understand just how you felt about it, Agnes; you knew he'd laugh. Go on, Willis."

Campbell: "And she sent her down here, and told Roberts to keep her till she came herself."

Both Ladies: "Well?"

Campbell: "And I found poor old Roberts here, looking out for a cook that he'd never seen before, and expecting to recognize a woman that he'd never met in his life." He explodes in another fit of laughter. The ladies stare at him in mystification.

Mrs. Roberts: "I would have stayed myself to meet her, but I'd left my plush bag with my purse in it at Stearns's, and I had to go back after it."

Mrs. Campbell: "She *had* to leave him. What is there to laugh at?"

Mrs. Roberts: "I see nothing to laugh at, Willis."

Campbell, sobered: "You *don't?*"

Both Ladies: "No."

Campbell: "Well, by Jove! Then perhaps you don't see anything to laugh at in Roberts's having to guess who the cook was; and going up to the wrong woman, and her getting mad, and going out and bringing back her little fiery-red tipsy Irishman of a husband, that wanted to fight Roberts; and my having to lie out of it for him; and their going off again, and the husband coming back four or five times between drinks, and having to be smoothed up each time—"

Both Ladies: "No!"

Mrs. Roberts: "It was simply horrid."

Mrs. Campbell: "It wasn't funny at all; it was simply disgusting. Poor Mr. Roberts!"

Campbell: "Well, by the holy poker! This knocks me out! The next time I'll marry a man, and have somebody around that can appreciate a joke. The Irishman said himself it would make a cow laugh."

Mrs. Campbell: "I congratulate you on being of the same taste, Willis. And I dare say you tried to heighten the absurdity, and add to poor Mr. Roberts's perplexity."

Roberts: "No, no! I assure you, Amy, if it hadn't been for Willis, I shouldn't have known how to manage. I was quite at my wits' end."

Mrs. Campbell: "You are very generous, I'm sure, Mr. Roberts; and I suppose I shall have to believe *you*."

Roberts: "But I couldn't act upon the suggestion to take the man out and treat him; Willis was convinced himself, I think, that that wouldn't do. But I confess I was tempted."

Mrs. Roberts: "Treat him?"

Roberts: "Yes. He was rather tipsy already; and Willis thought he would be more peaceable perhaps if we could get

him quite drunk; but I really couldn't bring my mind to it, though I was so distracted that I was on the point of yielding."

Both Ladies: "Willis!"

Mrs. Roberts: "You wanted poor Edward to go out and drink with that wretched being, so as to get him into a still worse state?"

Mrs. Campbell: "You suggested that poor Mr. Roberts should do such a thing as that? Well, Willis!"

Mrs. Roberts: "Well, Willis!" She turns from him more in sorrow than in anger, and confronts a cook-like person of comfortable bulk, with a bundle in her hand, and every mark of hurry and exhaustion in her countenance. "Why, here's Bridget now!"

The Cook: "Maggie, mem! I was afraid I was after missun' you, after all. I couldn't see the gentleman anywhere, and I've been runnun' up and down the depot askun' fur um; and at last, thinks I, I'll try the ladies' room; and sure enough here ye was yourself. It was lucky I thought of it."

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Mrs. Roberts: "Oh! I forgot to tell you he'd be in the ladies' room. But it's all right now, Maggie; and we've just got time to catch our train."

Campbell, bitterly: "Well, Agnes, for a woman that's set so many people by the ears, you let yourself up pretty easily. By Jove! here comes that fellow back again!" They all mechanically shrink aside, and leave Roberts exposed to the approach of McIlheny.

McIlheny: "Now, sor, me thrain's gahn, and we can talk this little matter oover at our aise. What did ye mane, sor, by comin' up to the Hannorable Mrs. Michael McIlheny and askun' her if she was a cuke? Did she luke like a person that 'd demane herself to a manial position like that? Her that never put her hands in wather, and had hilpers to milk her father's cows? What did ye mane, sor? Did she luke like a lady, or did she luke like a cuke? Tell me that!"

The Cook, bursting upon him from behind Roberts, who eagerly gives place to her: "*I'll* tell ye that meself, ye impidint felly! What's to kape a cuke from lukun'

"'Sure I wonder what Mary 'll be wantun' me to ask um next?'"

like a lady, or a lady from lukun' like a cuke? Ah, Mike McIlheny, ye drunken blaggurd, is it *me* ye're tellin' that Mary Molloy never put her hands in wather, and kept hilpers to milk her father's cows! Cows indade! It was wan pig under the bed; and more shame to them that's ashamed to call it a pig, if ye *are* my cousin! *I'm* the lady the gentleman was lukin' for, and if ye think I'm not as good as Mary Molloy the best day she ever stipped, I'll thank ye to tell me who is. Be off wid ye, or I'll say something ye'll not like to hear!"

McIlheny: "Sure I was jokin', Maggie! I was goun' to tell the gintleman that if he was lukun' for a cuke, I'd a cousin out of place that was the best professed cuke in Bahston. And I'm glad he's got ye: and he's a gintleman every inch, and so's his lady, I dar' say, though I haven't the pleasure of her acquaintance—"

The Colored Man who calls the Trains: "Cars ready for West Newton, Auburndale, Riverside, Wellesley, Natick, and South Framingham. Train for South

Framingham. Express to West Newton. Track No. 5."

Mrs. Roberts: "That's our train, Amy! We get off at Auburndale. Willis. Edward, Maggie—come!" They all rush out, leaving McIlheny alone.

McIlheny, looking thoughtfully after them: "Sure, I wonder what Mary'll be wantun' me to ask um next!"

THE END

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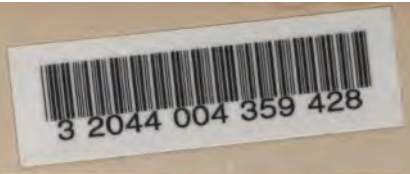

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